

April 26, 2017

Dear Appropriations Committee Member:

Michigan
Grocers

Michigan
Retailers

Michigan
Dairy Foods
Association

Michigan
Corn
Growers
Association

Michigan
Sugar

Michigan
Potato
Growers

Michigan
Soft Drink
Association

Associated
Food and
Petroleum
Dealers

Michigan
Milk
Producers

We are writing to express our opposition to boilerplate added by the House Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee to HB 4238 that would require the Department of Health and Human Services to monitor the state of Maine's request for a waiver to the United States Department of Agriculture to ban Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) users from purchasing candy and sugar sweetened beverages through the program and submit the same waiver in Michigan if the USDA approves the Maine request.

A recent USDA study found that SNAP and no-SNAP households make nearly the same purchasing decisions. While we understand the need to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars, the goals in limiting the food choices of SNAP families remain unclear. The same amount of federal tax dollars will continue to be expended as this does not limit SNAP dollars allocated to families. SNAP is not the same as WIC, a nutrition prescription program for expectant moms and babies. SNAP households include working families, veterans, and more than 70% of SNAP benefits go to families with children. Further, the commencement of government deciding which foods are "good" or "bad" for certain people would set us on a slope that may become more slippery if future decision makers decide that certain Michigan made cereals, snack foods, or ice creams shouldn't be allowed in the carts of Michigan families.

If soft drinks are the target, it should be noted that even as obesity has risen 16% since 1985 (CDC), calories from soft drinks have decreased 27% over the same time period through the offering of smaller can sizes; more teas, juices, and waters (many of which- even 0 calorie sweetened waters- would also be banned); and calorie info on the front of the container. Americans get only about 6% of their calories from these beverages produced across Michigan.

Asking Lansing to parse through the nutritional profile of hundreds of thousands of grocery items to determine eligibility will only bring more bureaucracy to the government many seek to reform. Restrictions would create a "food code" more complicated than the tax code, turning grocery clerks into the food police at the check-out.

As a society, we've made progress on making this process of helping families less stigmatic through the use of debit cards while allowing them to make their own decisions on food. Bans and restrictions don't teach us anything about managing our caloric intake. We support educating families using SNAP about balancing what they eat, drink and do without taking away their opportunities to have a treat or offer one to their children.